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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. von WAGNER (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m

AGENDA ITEM 156: RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORK AND REFORM OF THE AGENDA OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE (A/48/194) (continued)

1. Mr. BANDURA (Ukraine) said that with the end of the cold war and the resulting rapprochement between States which had formerly been enemies, it had become necessary to reorganize the work of the Committee. A first step had already been taken by grouping together the items relating to multilateral disarmament and international security, a combination which had been suggested by Ukraine, among other countries, and by reducing the number of plenary meetings and draft resolutions. In that connection, the Secretariat was to be commended for having been able to improve the quality of the conference services in spite of the reductions in the staff of those services.

2. Turning to the Secretary-General's report (A/C.1/47/7), he said it was important to consider the functions and machinery of the main multilateral arms control and disarmament bodies: the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament. It was necessary to find the best means for cooperation between those bodies, which were intrinsically different. He took note of the good work carried out under the chairmanship of the Ambassador of Australia in working out a procedure for increasing the number of members of the Conference on Disarmament, which had to function as a permanent observation and verification organ for the implementation of a number of international agreements. Ukraine, which had inherited a significant arms capability, hoped to become a full member of the Conference.

3. The Committee should assign degrees of priority to arms control and disarmament questions, and through broad consultations among its members, establish the basic elements of future international legal arguments on them and the principles which would later be incorporated into the documents of the Conference on Disarmament and other bodies. It was also essential to continue the process of taking joint decisions in those two areas. Those problems could be resolved by rationalization of the Committee's work, critical analysis of its programme and increased interaction between the Committee and the Centre for Disarmament Affairs. If the questions raised in the unofficial document submitted by the Chairman were resolved it would be possible to reach a consensus on improving the work of the Committee.

4. An impartial assessment of the Committee's agenda should be carried out. Among the changes suggested in it, those put forward in the Chairman's paper and that of the European Community, which grouped agenda items in order to facilitate the Committee's work, seemed especially useful. The next step would be to decide which groups of items required urgent action, while consideration of other items and the approval of the relevant resolutions and decisions could be carried out every two or three years. If those steps were taken it would be possible to save a great deal of time and to deal with other items appropriate to the Committee which were traditionally allocated to other Committees or to the plenary sessions.

5. The Centre for Disarmament Affairs fulfilled an increasingly important function. One example of that was the establishment of the Register of Conventional Arms. His delegation supported the request made by other

(Mr. Bandura, Ukraine)

delegations that the Centre should be given the resources to carry out its work effectively.

6. The Organization of regional disarmament symposiums was an important initiative. The last one, held in Kiev, had been very useful. Such symposiums provided a practical vision of how the resolutions approved by international organizations could be implemented.

7. The three unofficial texts under consideration contained interesting new elements and it would be useful if they were combined into a single document embodying those supported by all delegations.

8. Mr. PERRI (Brazil) noted that the Committee's terms of reference were very broad, enabling it to make the most efficient use of the creativity and flexibility of Member States in order to achieve its political objectives. The work of the Committee had been oriented towards covering the widest possible range of disarmament subjects, while concentrating on issues on which progress was more visibly within reach. However, the international community had not yet fulfilled the expectations of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. On the other hand, the Committee had been able to adapt to new situations, as was shown by the adoption of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the establishment of the Register of Conventional Arms, and in its negotiations on disarmament had always maintained the priorities and followed the guidelines, principles and main objectives of the United Nations on that subject.

9. Brazil had always supported measures to improve the capacity of the United Nations to fulfil its tasks democratically and had therefore endorsed all efforts towards a modernization of its working methods so that it could achieve concrete results in all sectors and bodies. It was nevertheless necessary to be prudent whenever addressing issues that could lead to sudden changes in well established patterns and procedures. That was Brazil's position concerning the reform of the United Nations in a broad sense and on the item under consideration by the Committee.

10. Brazil favoured efforts directed towards enabling the United Nations to enter the next century as the international democratic forum of humanity, promoting peace, development and cooperation among nations. It firmly supported the process of renewal and would therefore welcome measures intended to improve the Committee's methods and actions. It nevertheless considered that the Committee had not yet attained its objectives and that there had not been such developments in the international situation as to warrant definitive changes in those objectives. On the other hand, new concepts, which required further development and consolidation, such as preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peace-preserving measures, might in the future be incorporated among the Committee's concerns.

11. Mr. FASEHUN (Nigeria), referring to the debate which had culminated in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 47/54 G, recalled the views expressed on that occasion by many delegations, including that of Nigeria, that the Committee must continue to focus on disarmament and reflect the concerns of Member States,

(Mr. Fasehun, Nigeria)

that the end of the cold war afforded a timely opportunity for multilateralism and the expansion of arms control, disarmament and the discussion of issues relating to international security, and that the agenda and work of the First Committee could only be rationalized on an ongoing basis, as necessary and after extensive consultations.

12. His delegation regarded the current meeting as part of the process of consultations recommended in that resolution. Since the objectives of reducing and ultimately eliminating nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms, as laid down at the first special session devoted to disarmament, had not yet been achieved, particularly in regard to the States with the greatest military Power, the Committee should continue to focus on those issues during its discussions. Disarmament was an important aspect of international security; it was therefore necessary to continue to include other aspects of international security in the debate on disarmament.

13. In the light of the foregoing, Nigeria saw no reason why concepts such as preventive diplomacy should be introduced into the work of the First Committee, when there were other General Assembly organs already dealing with related issues. It therefore recommended the following clustering of agenda items: nuclear disarmament, other weapons of mass destruction, conventional weapons, confidence-building measures at the global and regional levels, issues related to international peace and security, and the question of Antarctica.

14. At the current session, items could be clustered along thematic lines and the results could be assessed before any restructuring was undertaken. The number of resolutions should be reduced and positions should be reconciled. Restructuring and reform were a gradual process; the Committee should therefore proceed with caution and avoid any undue haste.

15. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the Nigerian proposal regarding the clustering of agenda items, suggested that that delegation should contact the delegation of the Netherlands or that of Belgium with a view to consolidating their proposals.

16. Mr. THANARAJASINGAM (Malaysia) said his delegation believed that the Committee should continue to deal with disarmament and international security issues. Despite the reduced number of meetings, the thematic clustering of agenda items seemed to be working well, although it was too early to establish conclusive indicators. The real test would be when the Committee began to consider the draft resolutions. He agreed, however, that the Committee should not act in haste. The threats to international peace and security had not been greatly reduced, despite the end of the cold war. Rationalization and reform must therefore be a continuous process of consultations, involving consensus and flexibility among the participants. Moreover, it must be emphasized that the Committee would not be in a position to draw any conclusions until it had considered all the agenda items. That was particularly important in the case of agenda items for which the report had not yet been made available, such as the item on the question of Antarctica.

17. With regard to the issues raised in the non-paper presented by the Chairman, his delegation welcomed the idea of a free-flowing debate. It also wished to see the discussions result in the formulation of recommendations,

(Mr. Thanarajasingam, Malaysia)

which, in principle, should be limited in number, while resolutions should be drafted as necessary. As for the complementary activities in the context of preventive diplomacy and related matters, there was no doubt that they were relevant to the work of the First Committee. However, the item on the whole question of peace-keeping operations in all their aspects was being considered by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee). It was thus clear that the informal working group on the revitalization of the General Assembly should continue until it had completed its work.

18. As far as the various subitems mentioned by the Chairman were concerned, Malaysia believed that the regional and subregional organizations had an important role to play in matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, as was evident from events in Somalia. However, the fact that such organizations were not uniform should be taken into account when their participation was requested. As to the issue of openness and restraint in the production, procurement and deployment of armaments, it would be better for the regional bodies to exchange views among themselves first. Lastly, Malaysia considered that the Centre for Disarmament could complement the work of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

19. Mr. LAINE (Finland) said that his country fully supported the proposals for the rationalization of the work of the First Committee put forward by the European Community. The work of the Committee would be greatly facilitated by merging the agenda items on disarmament and international security matters and clustering those on related topics. As to the issue raised by the Chairman in his non-paper on the type of debate that should be held, Finland preferred a structured debate, in other words a debate on specific themes along the lines suggested in the proposal by the European Community. The adoption of such an approach would be a first step towards rationalization that should be taken during the current session.

20. Furthermore, Finland supported the general approach to the reform of the Committee's agenda outlined in the non-paper presented by the Chairman. That approach would allow the work of the Committee to be geared towards the practical integration of disarmament issues into the broader structure of the international peace and security agenda, as suggested by the Secretary-General. Finland had argued vigorously for such an integrated approach. Reforming the agenda of the Committee along the lines suggested by the Chairman might be a second step towards rationalization, which ideally should be taken during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly following consultations with the other Committees concerned.

21. As a European country, Finland maintained its belief in the regional approach to security and arms control and welcomed the fact that the value of such an approach had been recognized in the United Nations through the work of the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee. However, the discussion of specific regional approaches in a global forum might, on the one hand, lead to complications among the countries concerned and, on the other hand, fail to arouse the interest of those not directly involved.

22. Mr. SERGEEV (Russian Federation) welcomed the fact that the number of draft resolutions had been reduced by grouping them and by the decision to consider some items every two or three years. Furthermore, he considered it appropriate to discuss international security matters in conjunction with issues relating to disarmament. The process should be a gradual one which would not undermine the importance of disarmament, nor the place it occupied in the work of the Committee.

23. The rationalization of the work of the Committee had gained momentum and what was now important was to take practical measures. In that connection, the Russian Federation supported the proposals put forward by the European Community regarding the restructuring of the Committee's agenda. The idea of clustering items under general headings was more rational and would reflect more accurately the work done by the Committee and the issues under consideration. It would prove useful in consolidating draft resolutions on the same subject and pinpointing problems which were not of interest to delegations.

24. The Russian Federation continued to hold the view that the Conference on Disarmament was an independent negotiating body which worked on the basis of consensus.

25. Mr. CHANDRA (India) said that his delegation did not wish to see changes introduced into the agenda or into the priorities indicated therein. The rationalization of the work of the First Committee should deal only with practical issues.

26. With regard to the non-papers on the subject, the one submitted by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries took a cautious approach which had been clearly evident in their deliberations during the drafting of the text. Although those countries understood perfectly the importance of rationalization, they did not wish to be unduly hasty in the matter.

27. The text presented by the European Community was more ambitious in scope, raised specific questions and provided more details. However, the most ambitious of all the texts was the Chairman's. It was, in fact, too ambitious and would create problems at the current stage. Consideration should be given to the possibility of merging the texts of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and of the European Community, perhaps through the Friends of the Chair. The latter text contained some useful ideas which, in his delegation's view, should be further developed. Lastly, he said it would not be wise to submit draft resolutions on the subject without first holding consultations.

28. Mr. BROTODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that the members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other developing countries remained committed to the spirit and letter of the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to disarmament, and to the priorities set therein. They were prepared to play an active role in efforts designed to improve the functioning of the First Committee. However, the fact that the Committee was attempting to improve its functioning did not mean that it should lose sight of the current exercise undertaken in the larger context of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly as a whole.

29. Mr. COLLINS (Ireland), referring to the non-paper on the rationalization of the agenda of the First Committee presented by the Chairman, said he had rightly set that matter in the overall context of the discussion taking place throughout the United Nations on the issue of reform. The resolutions mentioned in the Chairman's non-paper, resolutions 47/120 A and 47/120 B, referred to the General Assembly, in the context of the Charter, and the way in which it carried out its functions. Resolution 47/233 also committed the General Assembly to continue examining, in an informal open-ended working group, proposals relating to the rationalization of its agenda and the revitalization process in general. It was well that the First Committee should be aware of that broader context and should attempt to consider ways in which it could contribute to that process or facilitate it in any way. It was also possible that it could not facilitate the work of the General Assembly on the rationalization of its work and agenda, but the First Committee should not put its head in the sand.

30. His delegation had always regarded the role of the First Committee as essentially political, and all the questions raised in the Chairman's non-paper seemed to accord with that role. However, it was undeniable that the Committee had been narrowing its focus in recent years. In fact, although it was now called the Disarmament and International Security Committee, there was almost no real discussion of international security in the Committee. The proposals outlined in the Chairman's non-paper could serve as useful guidelines in a review of the way in which the First Committee carried out its functions in that area.

31. Mr. STELZER (Austria) said that the fact that the First Committee had been attempting to effect reforms for decades showed that the importance of the subject was one of the factors impeding the search for lasting solutions. At the same time, the First Committee had shown great flexibility in adapting itself to changes in the agenda and procedures; that flexibility should be maintained.

32. The three non-papers which the Committee was considering contained provisions which deserved to be supported and studied. His delegation also supported the thematic approach to reform. The clustering of items would contribute to the rationalization and would facilitate the organization of the Committee's work without the need for a reordering of the priorities in the agenda.

33. Mr. GEVERS (Netherlands), referring to the statement by the representative of India regarding the holding of consultations before the submission of draft resolutions, sought clarification on the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions.

34. The CHAIRMAN said that the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions relating to agenda items 57 to 75 and 77 to 82 would be Thursday, 4 November, at 6 p.m., while the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions relating to agenda item 156 would be Friday, 5 November, at 6 p.m. The question of the second of those deadlines would, however, be taken up again later.

35. Mr. BIDIKOU (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said, in connection with the statement by the representative of Greece at the meeting held on Monday, 1 November, that, in

(Mr. Bidikou, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 817 (1993), hisdelegation was entitled to use the constitutional name of his country, namely the Republic of Macedonia.

36. Mr. STEPHANOU (Greece), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that in resolution 817 (1993) the Security Council had recommended the admission to membership in the United Nations of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and explicitly stated that that State would be referred to as such for all purposes within the United Nations pending settlement of the difference that had arisen over the name, a settlement which had not yet been achieved. The aforementioned resolution did not admit of any other interpretation, nor did anything in it indicate that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could use a name other than that one.

37. Mr. BIDIKOU (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Greece was insisting on an incorrect interpretation of Security Council resolution 817 (1993) and suggested that the Greek delegation should consult the Office of Legal Affairs.

38. Mr. STEPHANOU (Greece), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, despite the interpretation placed on the resolution by the representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the text of the resolution was self-explanatory and would have no meaning if it were interpreted differently.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.